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Robert Louis Stevenson's Letter,

MR. EDITOR: It is with feelings

of the most intense surprise as well as indignation, that one reads the abusive phillipic which Robert Louis Stevenson has seen fit to direct against Dr. Hyde. It would seem that the customs of Bohemia place one above or below the ordinary decencies and restraints of life. Dr. Hyde writes a short, hasty, private letter to a friend, which is published without his knowledge or consent. This, Mr. Stevenson, without informing himself as to whether the publication was authorized or not, without making any inquiry into the truth of its allegations, without even giving himself the trouble to deny them, makes the text of a six column invective against Dr. Hyde, an invective the brutality and grossness of which are set in a more glaring light by the powerful English in which it is clothed. It is no excuse to say that Stevenson did not know that the letter was not intended for publication. He ought to have informed himself. It was not merely private in form, but bore all the internal evidences of this character. It was on the face of it not intended for publication, and this circumstance ought to have put Mr. Stevenson on his guard. It did not however have that effect. He gave himself the trouble of no inquiry, but proceeded to constitute himself judge in the cause, and damned the criminal,-a criminal whose only existence was his own heated imagination,-without the ceremony of a

bearing. Father Damien is in his grave, and we have every wish to let him rest peaceably there. If Mr. Stevenson had been contented to do so as well, it would never have become necessary to write this article. As he has seen fit to make the character of the dead the text from which to draw his accusations of the living, we are compelled to follow him. Considerations of charity.-considerations of which Mr. Stevenson, although he preaches them over loudly, seems to know but little,-have hitherto sealed our lips. But we owe it to the living not to be silent when they are maligned, even though we are compelled to speak of the dead, truths to forgetfulness.

Space does not permit me to take up the article of Mr. Stevenson in detail. It would require a volume to follow and refute every misrepresentation, to expose every false and unjust inference, to comment on every insinuation. The letter abounds in insult but not in argument. It is fruitful in abuse but not in judicious comment. It has all the merits of lively imagination, heated emotions, and literary facility, but nothing of good judgment, good taste, and common

As a matter of argument, Mr. Stevenson's letter contains nothing worthy of a reply. It admits every allegation of Dr. Hyde's letter save one, which it neither admits nor denies. This happens however to be just the one which is the most important of all, and on which the whole controversy really turns. Mr. Stevenson had heard the charge in question once before, in a half drunken crowd in a bar-room in Samoa, among whom he seems to have been passing the evening. The author appears to assume that Dr. Hyde had not heard it from any more authoritative source. He intimates that prurient gossip must furnish a favorite topic of conversation in Dr. Hyde's family,--a contemptible insinuation coming strangely enough from any gentleman, doubly strange here, since it seems to apply much better to its Bohemian author, who by his own account heard the story from a drunken rowdy in a bar-room, than it does to Dr. Hyde.

Just why Mr. Stevenson should assume that Dr. Hyde had the story from no more authentic source than he himself had, we are at a loss to say. Perhaps the distinguished author of Olalla and Kidnapped feels that he has the right to a logic as well as to a morality of his own. We will not pretend to pass upon the point, but certainly the inference that because the drunken rowdy aforesaid regarded the offence as a venal comes to make up his estimate of one, therefore Dr. Hyde was bound his subject, this letter (which proto do so too, is a striking confirmation of this view. To us who share since used his best efforts to supthe current respect for Aristotle and press) must play a part in deterhave no peculiar morality of our mining final judgment. If the bioown, it seems a necessary part of Mr. Stevenson's case to show either that the fact alluded to by Dr. Hyde either was not a fact at mancer, the worshipper of heroes all, or at any rate to make it clear and heroic actions, came to these that he had nothing more than tropic shores in search of new literformmon rumor to base his belief ary material; that he thought he pon. In the absence of these had struck a bonanza in Father proofs (the place of which can by no means be supplied by insulting innuendoes) our humble apprehension cannot avoid the conclusion that Mr. Stevenson's savage attack upon Dr. Hyde is as repug-distinguished author flies into a DURING MY TEMPORARY absence from the Kingdom, Dr. E. L. attack upon Dr. Hyde is as repug-

nant to reason as it is to charity the capacity to think straight, to exercise sound judgment, and a and reputation of his fellow crea-

Possibly this is one of Nature's not to make affront too much our common clay) she has deprived the Otto " of the ordinary discernment, moderation, justice and charity which she dispenses to average hardly an extravagant inference from a letter as wanting as well may be in all these qualities.

We are not concerned here with the truth of falsity of the allegation with regard to Father Damien, nor with the source from which Dr. Hyde obtained his information (it was probably not in a bar room). Those were matters for Mr. Stevenson, if he could but have seen it. We are simply calling attention to the gratuitous character of the assumptions on which the whole fabric of insult and detraction is erected. It may be answered that Mr. Stevenson contends that, true or false, Dr. Hyde was barred from making any comments on the character of a member of a rival faith. Mr. Stevenson does certainly make this contention, and does so with a vast display of rhetoric and fine indignation. We can only say that this is establishing a censorship over private correspondence which would probably be as little tolerable to its proposer as to the rest of the world. Dr. Hyde's letter was written in reply to the inquiries of a private correspon dent. Most men would say that he was entirely justified in making any reply which the facts justify, even though such a reply might be very fatal to the self erected idols of a romantic idealist. Mr.Stevenson may have another morality which possibly he lives by. We are very willing to believe so. But it will not do for us, and we confess to an inclination to classify it among the romantic vagaries of a sentimentalist, than to regard it as a fruitful contribution to morals.

It is impossible to follow Mr. Stevenson in detail. I have not the charm of style which reconciles his readers to six columns without any content beyond a variation in terms which we would gladly have left of abuse. As a literary phillipic his letter very justly commands our admiration. Unfortunately it happens to be an infamous libel as well. The name of Stevenson will give it a wide currency, while denials will be forgotten.

> Mr.Stevenson has two grievances against Dr. Hyde on which he never wearies of enlarging. One is that the doctor has never visited Molokai. He forgets that Dr. Hyde is not an author, and that there were in his case no motives of literary curiosity to overcome the natural repugnance which even distinguished authors feel to witnessing the sufferings of their fellow creatures. The other grievance is that Dr. Hyde lives in a comfortable house. He evidently thinks that the religious are dedicated to filth and misery in their own persons, and is shocked at the spectacle of a Christian minister living in modest comforts.

This sentiment is perhaps a survival of a strictly orthodox ancestry and training, and if so is the only one which Mr. Stevenson's long letter has to show. The savage intolerance which it displays would have offended even John Knox. We mistake. Mr. Stevenson covers one frailty with a broad mantle of charity, the frailty of incontinence. This is a tolerance, however, which would have commended itself to Knox even less than the implacably persecuting vein in which the letter is otherwise composed. We conclude that Mr. Stevenson has inherited the intolerance of his ancestors; his charity is his own.

In witness whereof I have caused this Certificate to be issued at Honolulu, this 22d day of April, A. D., 1890, and the seal of the Department of the Interior to be hereto affixed. ity is his own.

It would be tedious to follow this letter further in detail. We have and its weakness. As the commentary on facts which it pretends to be, it is a thousand times worse than worthless. As a piece of the mental history of Mr. Robert Louis KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRES. man of genius is always interesting. When a future biographer his subject, this letter (which pro-bably its author will have long grapher is more curious than dis-

rage, calls names, and denounces and good feeling. The conclusion | the enemy with as cordial a hatred seems to lie very near at hand that as a child's for the doctor who has the power to write great romances deprived him of a tooth. Then the does not exclude a total want of biographer will moralize the tale. He will say that an idealist hates to have his idols shattered; that we little charity, and that a man in the all look on the iconoclast as an defense of imaginary ideals, may enemy; that authors are more senruthlessly trample on the rights sitive than the rest of us; and that though Stevenson indisputably behaved like an American schoolboy when he learns for the first time compensations by which (in order that Lanfrey and not John Abbot has described the real Napoleon, yet it was natural enough for him distinguished author of "Prince to do so-overwhelmed as he was with the feeling of a romance spoiled; that the romance "came to pass" after all, and that the distinmortals. Certainly this seems guished author repented, forgot and forgave even the fine house and the "blue ribbon."

We have not space to comment on the intolerance, arrogance and self-sufficiency of Mr. Stevenson's letter, he writes as a judge sentencing a criminal. As a judge he has more of the spirit of Shylock than of Portia. He knows nothing of the "quality of mercy." One naturally expects from the novelist more breadth of view, more of the spirit of allowance, more sense of the complexity of human character. But we forget that Mr. Stevenson is not a novelist, but a romancer, and that he feels himself as little in this letter as elsewhere, bound down to the actual facts of life. It is safe to say that the Dr. Hyde of this latest effusion is as purely the creature of the author's imagination, as the Mr. Hyde of his famous extravaganza.

It is needless to go further. Mr. Stevenson's whole treatment of this theme, it goes without saying, has more of the fervor of romance, than the sober truth of history. The talents which he has seen fit to pervert to the service of detraction and calumny, might continue to delight an ever widening circle of HOLLISTER & CO., 109 Fort St. readers, if he would but confine them to their sphere.

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[L. S.]

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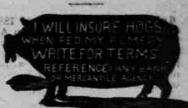
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